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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. BEEF IMPORTS

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused December 19-21 news coverage on preparations for the upcoming fourth round of cross-Straits negotiations; the demonstration organized by the DPP to protest cross-Straits negotiations and the Ma Ying-jeou administration's China-leaning policy; and an earthquake registering 6.8 on the Richter scale on Saturday night. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an op-ed in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" responded to a December 18 open letter by American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) Director William Stanton on the safety of U.S. beef. The op-ed, written by a PhD student who once publicly ate cattle dung at a media event to express his opposition to the Ma administration's decision to fully open Taiwan's market to U.S. beef, praised Stanton's sincerity in communicating with the people of Taiwan. However, the op-ed still expressed serious concerns about the safety of U.S. beef and its impact on the health of human beings. End summary.

"The Things that Director William Stanton Did Not Mention"

Chu Cheng-chi, who is a PhD student at the Graduate Institute of Sociology at the National Taiwan University and consumed cattle dung, opined in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [520,000] (12/21):

"American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) Director William Stanton sent a letter to media, trying to reassure the people of Taiwan's concerns on U.S. beef. This move is praiseworthy and I believe that many citizens of Taiwan could sense the great thought he has devoted to the matter. At least, Director Stanton is more "progressive" than Minister of Health Yang Chih-liang. He [Director Stanton] is willing to apologize publicly for his own out of tune remarks of 'scooters' [relating the risk rates of riding scooters in Taiwan and eating U.S. beef] and willing to use scientific evidence as a basis to provide public explanations. Looking back at Minister Yang, who uses populist approaches, such as committing hari-kari, asking the citizens [of Taiwan] to eat beef from cattle under the age of thirty months old and should not be picky [about the government's decision on U.S. beef], eating U.S. beef is safer than crossing roads, and constantly lying that 'not eating [U.S. beef] would be all right, and hypocritically saying that he wanted to apologize to people who love U.S. bone-in-beef, offal and ground beef.

"Since Director Stanton has the sincerity to communicate with the people of Taiwan, I feel necessary to provide some additional explanation for him to let the citizens have a full understanding, based on the 'solid scientific basis,' about U.S. beef, 'to help you make informed, confident decisions about the food you eat,' which is a point on which I hold the same belief as Director Stanton. Director Stanton said, 'there has never been a single proven case of the human version of so-called 'Mad Cow' Disease caused by eating American beef.' First of all, 'human beings' certainly do not contract the mad 'cow' disease (BSE). Rather, it is the new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD) that occurred on cattle being called mad cow disease. Of course there is no so-called 'mad cow disease' on human beings. It is like 'the foot-and-mouth disease' does not occur on human beings. Only 'hand, foot and mouth disease'

does. We believed that it was only Director Stanton's lapse of the pen, unlike Minister Yaung, who once resorted to a sophistry that 'the United States was never an infected zone of the mad cow disease' by saying that 'no human beings in the United States have contracted mad cow disease.' Another point of Director Stanton's remark in this paragraph was that, there has never been a single 'proven case' of the new vCJD by 'eating' U.S. beef.' Scientifically, it is indeed unable to prove one hundred percent that eating beef from cattle infected with mad cow disease would result in new vCJD. Similarly, science is still unable to prove that eating genetic modified food would cause harm to the human beings. However, why do many countries still hold a reserved attitude toward genetic modified food? ...

"Director Stanton also had one vague statement, which is, the 'World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) supports the safety of U.S. beef and beef products.' Precisely speaking, the OIE's differentiation on mad cow disease is not by 'the infected zone' or 'the disease-free zone.' Rather, it is by 'undetermined BSE risk zone', 'controlled BSE risk zone,' and 'negligible BSE risk zone.' The United States belongs to the 'controlled BSE risk zone.' As a result, U.S. beef, under certain slaughtering procedures, is allowed to be traded. Nevertheless, the United States has the loosest regulations regarding beef products [of any other countries] in the category of the 'controlled BSE risk zone,' far less than that of Japan or Canada. It is still fresh in one's memory that two people died from eating e-coli contaminated ground beef burgers. It is an overly vague and exaggerating statement that 'the OIE supports the safety of U.S. beef and beef products.' [I] hope that the citizens in Taiwan, rather than just reading information on the website of AIT, which represents the country exporting U.S. beef, should refer to information from multiple sources to safeguard the health of their own and the next generation."

STANTON